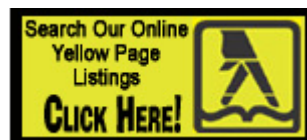


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Posted: 05/28/05 - 07:51:47 pm EDT

Funding to help farmers continue to grow tobacco would be foolish

When legislators in 2000 directed that half of Kentucky's share of the Master Settlement Agreement with tobacco companies be used to help farmers develop alternative crops, they wisely recognized tobacco was a crop in decline.

Yet now some tobacco farmers are asking that a portion of that money be used not to help them kick the tobacco habit, but to assist them in continuing to grow tobacco despite a market for burley that has declined by more than 50 percent in just the last four years. To use the money to help farmers continue to grow tobacco not only would be a direct violation of the intended use of the Agriculture Development Fund, but it would be a foolish expenditure of money that could be better used to help farmers switch to crops with rosier financial futures than tobacco.

Yet, state Sen. Joey Pendleton, D-Hopkinsville, defends the request of tobacco farmers. "If Toyota was leaving Kentucky, we'd do everything under the sun to keep Toyota in Kentucky," the senator told the Courier-Journal in Louisville. "I look at the tobacco industry the same way."

That comparison won't fly. The automobile industry is a thriving, growing industry with a bright future; only a fool would say that about the tobacco industry. A more accurate analogy would be something like this: Helping farmers continue to grow tobacco in 2005 is like spending money to prop up the

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manufacturer of horse-drawn wagons in 1920.

The tobacco buyout approved by Congress last fall will send some \$2.5 billion in direct payments to Kentucky tobacco farmers and quota holders. In addition, the Kentucky General Assembly granted farmers another \$114 million this year.

All that money is to help farmers cease to grow tobacco. With so much money being invested on not growing tobacco, it makes no sense to invest another penny to encourage farmers to continue to plant burley. Of course, some farmers will continue to grow tobacco, but that decision should be based on the market, not outside revenue help.

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